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(II.)—DUTY OF A RICH NATION TO TAKE CARE OF HER CHILDREN

BY PROFESSOR CHARLES R. HENDERSON,
Representing the Governor of Illinois.

His Excellency, Governor Deneen, has requested me to present his sincere regrets and to speak for him the welcome of our commonwealth and his own deep personal interest in the causes here represented. It is possible for citizens of Illinois to appear in this company with something of elation and hope, because we have fought a good fight and succeeded fairly well up to this time in advancing the interests of the working children in this region. We always think of the pioneer services of Mrs. Florence Kelley and her fellow-workers at Hull House and elsewhere, who have stood with womanly zeal and patriotic devotion for humane legislation. They have not only been interpreters of the poor to the rich, but they have helped the rich and the strong to discover their own best interests and their own best selves, for so long as a manager of industry is permitted to do wrong and to be cruel, even in ignorance, his conscience is hardened and his nobler nature never has a chance fully to assert itself. Therefore, while men have been made indignant by this movement in our state, they have doubtless come upon reflection and after experience to see that we do not represent a class interest, but the interest of the whole people and of the human race.

Our present Factory Inspector, Edgar T. Davies, also deserves a word of honorable mention in this connection. He has honestly endeavored, not only to enforce the law, but to study it in its working and effects with all fidelity; to secure competent advice, and to give wise counsel to those who have power to make laws. If our esteemed Governor were present, he himself could speak with confidence and pride of what has been accomplished. We acknowledge that much remains to be done in Illinois, but what has been achieved is a pledge and token of what earnest and brave hearts are determined to do in the future.

What obligations does our national wealth impose upon us in every commonwealth where industries are carried on?

(1) First of all our numerous and rapidly increasing wealth takes from us the paltry excuse that child labor is necessary to support industry. So long as strong and willing men and women are almost begging for employment it is false to claim that the commodities needed by human society require the exploitation of childhood.

(2) Nor can we say, with any shadow of reason, that the labor of any child under fourteen is necessary to support a widowed mother or a sick father. Indeed, no state and no nation can afford to offer up such a sacrifice to such an end. The widowed mother and sick father should, indeed, have the relief which their wants require, but let that be done at the expense of the capable and the successful, not at the cost of innocent and immature human beings. The nation must not use up its children in the present, because they are needed in the fullness of their strength in the future. No more short-sighted economic policy was ever pursued by a benighted people than the policy of destroying childhood in mines, mills and factories.

(3) If our industries were required to prevent all avoidable accident and disease due to the hazard of occupation and by a system of insurance, provide for families temporarily or permanently deprived of income by injury or invalidism, there would be far less need of either public or private charity than now, and children would not be asked to carry a burden which manufacturers should bear.

What are the specific duties of the nation, acting as it must, chiefly through state legislation and administration?

(1) First, it should provide bureaus for a thorough and a constant *investigation* of the condition of child life. An occasional, and even periodical, investigation is not adequate. The evils of child labor are constantly pressing upon our attention. There will always be a temptation on the part of certain short-sighted employers to think that child labor is cheap. So long as light machinery, driven by inanimate power, makes it possible, some one will be found to employ children. On the other hand, poverty will always present a strong incentive to ignorant parents to send their children where they can add a little to the immediate income of the family. Children themselves sometimes desire to escape from school, and to have, at least, a little spending money of their own. Both of

these are ignorant of the ultimate effects of factory work. The custom of immigrants to work with their children in the field has a similar effect, and country people are not aware of the dangers of urban industries. Therefore, the State and the Federal Government must provide a constant corps of inspectors and investigators for the study of the changing conditions in factories and mills.

(2) In the second place, we must work for *uniformity* in the laws of the several states in order that the manufacturers of the different states may be treated fairly in their competition with each other. Whether this shall be done by some Federal law or by state laws introduced through a joint commission cannot be discussed at this moment, though it deserves full attention.

(3) Uniformity of legislation is not so important as a *higher standard* for legislation—though both are closely connected.

(4) In the fourth place, we must work out far more completely than we have ever done yet a policy for the transition period between the play and school activities of young children, and the steady occupations of mature persons. This period, extending from about the fourteenth to the seventeenth year, has not been sufficiently considered in our movement. It should receive much more prominent place in the Anti-Child Labor Creed than it has yet had. The fact that a discussion of the connection between child-labor legislation and trade instruction of young persons is on our program shows that this thought has found a welcome in many minds throughout the Union. Indeed, our cause has been seriously hindered hitherto because it was thought that we had not made provision for the proper occupation of children during this transition period. We have given apparently too much ground for the declaration that it would be better to keep the child busy in the factory than to let him run idly on the streets. Of course, no such alternative is necessary or was ever thought of by any of us, but we must in our discussion remove all just ground for this criticism.